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1946

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"What Every Woman Knows"

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 9, 1946

A Barrie Comedy Second Offering Of American Repertory Players

By JOHN CHAPMAN

James M. Barrie's kindly pat on the head for the female of the human species, "What Every Woman Knows," was presented last evening by the American Repertory Theatre as the second play of its program at the International. It serves its intended purpose of providing a change of pace for both players and audience after the inaugural "Henry VIII," and it demonstrates that several of the company—Eva Le Gallienne in particular—are accomplished repertory players.

Mr. Barrie's comedy, being soundly built on the infallible assumption that men are stubborn fellows but women know how to handle them, is more than a curio and better than a period piece. It has gentle, affectionate humor, and in only one moment—just one speech by Lady Sybil—does it seem a little too quaint to be real in these times. This is when Lady Sybil has to get herself offstage after being unmasked as the Other Woman.

The comedy concerns a fiercely ambitious young Scot who, in payment for a loan with which to complete his education, marries a plain girl six years his elder. He gets well up the parliamentary ladder before he discovers that his strength is not his own, but his wife's.

Revived After 20 Years.

I did not see "What Every Woman Knows" when it was done here 20 years ago with Helen Hayes as Maggie Shand, but I can imagine what it might have been. I can imagine that Miss Hayes may have invested the role with a subtle, femininely malicious humor that I found lacking in June Duprez' performance last evening. Miss Duprez, a handsome young woman, is so intent upon being a plain and matter-of-fact one that I feel she is missing some of the fun Barrie has offered her.

As the humorless, intense John Shand, Richard Waring is excellent. This makes two good performances to his credit, the other being Buckingham in "Henry VIII," which might be expected of an alumnus of Miss Le Gallienne's old Civic Repertory Theatre. And Miss Le Gallienne herself is on hand, displaying comforting assurance in the lightly amusing role of a French countess. Walter Hampden appears as a British statesman, and three Scottish characters are nicely played by Philip Bourneuf, Ernest Truex and Arthur Keegan. Quite all right, too, is Mary Alice Moore as Lady Sybil.

Paul Morrison's sets and David Pfolkes' costumes are very good turn-of-the-century stuff.

'WHAT EVERY WOMAN KNOWS.'

Play by J. M. Barrie; staged by Margaret Webster; scenery by Paul Morrison; costumes by David Pfolkes; presented by the American Repertory Theater, Inc., at the International Theater, Friday evening, November 8, 1946. The cast:

Alick Wylie.....Ernest Truex
James Wylie, David Wylie, his sons.....Arthur Keegan, Philip Bourneuf
Maggie Wylie, his daughter.....June Duprez
John Shand.....Richard Waring
Comtesse de la Briere.....Eva Le Gallienne
Lady Sybil Tenterden.....Mary Alice Moore
A Maid.....Cavada Humphrey
Charles Venables.....Walter Hampden
A Butler.....Efrem Zimbalist Jr.

SYNOPSIS—Act I, Scene 1. The Wylie house in the village of The Pans, Scotland. Time: the early nineteen hundreds. Scene 2. A barber shop used as Shand's committee rooms, Glasgow. Six years later. Act II. Scene 1. The Shand house in London. Two years later. Scene 2. The same. A few weeks later. Scene 3. The Countesse's cottage in Surrey. Three weeks later.

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 9, 1946

BarriePlaySympatheticallyMellow

'What Every Woman Knows' Shows RepertoryVariety

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The American Repertory Theater establishes a policy of variety with its second production. "What Every Woman Knows." From the panorama of "Henry VIII" it is a far fling to this intensely personal comedy of J. M. Barrie.

The Barrie work has a lasting humor about its treatment of a plain woman who subtly bolsters the career of her dashing husband.

To be sure, it has its slow sections, but for the most part it is sympathetically mellow. The humor and pathos that come to a boil in the final scene make it deeply satisfying.

Waring Is Convincing.

Richard Waring is a most convincing John Shand, the ambitious Scot who is proud of having no sense of humor. He gives reality without exaggeration to this dour young man who binds himself by contract to a future wedlock, in return for an education.

He is vain and fiery and somewhat obtuse as his career advances at a headlong rate.

When he finally discovers how much cleverer than he, his plain wife, Maggie, has been all along, his humility is touching. Waring projects the changes in the man clearly, but keeps Shand unwaveringly the same person.

June Duprez is less happy as Maggie. Her performance is probably just what Maggie would have appeared as in real life. But it lacks penetration and subtlety across the footlights.

She plays it at an unvarying pitch and with tonal monotony which will probably relax and gain color in future performances. Last night the role seemed devoid of the humor with which Maggie must have been most generously endowed.

It is not until the final scene that she takes on the warmth and gentleness, the hesitant courage that makes Maggie the most sympathetic of characters.

Eva Le Gallienne adds a delightful portrait as the Comtesse de la Briere, who is "old in iniquity" but wise enough to remain a spectator as she sees through Maggie's plans.

In her earlier appearances she seems a hollow character. Later, as a catalyst to the romance, she toys good-humoredly with youth and terrifies it with comments likegally beribboned icepicks.

Deliberate Bachelor.

Philip Bourneuf makes a realistic and amusing brother David for Maggie. With his physical movements as well as his reading he makes an authentic character of this deliberate bachelor.

Walter Hampden is a suave Member of Parliament who can be the lever of John's career. He is particularly good in the last brief scene when he reads with relish what purports to be John's second draft of his speech.

Mary Alice Moore is pleasant enough as Lady Sybil, and has some nicely amusing moments when she is forced to face her true reaction to the husband she has stolen.

Arthur Keegan makes a naive and tactless brother for David and Maggie, and Ernest Truex is somewhat silently in evidence as their father.

Crowd Without Crowd.

The play is at its best when the humor runs high, during the first act and at the end of the second. Margaret Webster has directed the laughs up without ever gagging them out of character.

In the scene of John's election, she again reveals her facility for suggesting a milling group of people without snarling up the stage.

During the course of this production of "What Every Woman Knows" there are some accents that would confound a true Scotsman. Miss Duprez has a way of pronouncing the singular first person pronoun as Aunt Jemima might, and some of her speeches sound as if they emanated from provinces far removed from the source of others.

On the whole the consistent burrs are those of the Messrs. Bourneuf and Waring.

* * *

In considering the activities of what is professedly a repertory company, it is interesting to note that a large proportion of all Broadway has turned repertory, at least in the sense of mixing new plays with revivals.

Of the 35 attractions currently listed, some 15 are resurrections in whole or in part. Of the 20 remaining, 12 have lasted over from other seasons.

Aside from being an interesting year for the average theatergoer, this is proving a rich season for the student of drama.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

NOVEMBER 9, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Barrie Still Blooms

J. M. BARRIE'S "What Every Women Knows" brings rich substance to the unfolding season of the American Repertory Theater. The play, for all its forty years, has charm, humor and all the fragrance of a not too distant past. The plot is neatly articulated; the theme is diffidently wise. There is a want of inspired acting in the revival at the International Theater, but the work itself distinguishes what one hopes will become a permanent repertory. After the chronicled pageantry of "Henry VIII" it is welcome entertainment on Columbus Circle.

* * *

As is likely to be the case with a repertory offering, "What Every Woman Knows" is uneven in execution. Several of the players, notably Richard Waring in the role of the stubborn John Shand, are very fine indeed, recapturing the peculiar mood of a period piece and making it flavorsome for the present day. He had a striking bit as Buckingham in "Henry VIII." He has a part of dimensions and sustained fascination in the Barrie drama and he fills it splendidly. As the humorless Scotsman, who contracts to marry a plain, queer woman, and almost fails to realize that she has made him something of a man and that he loves her, he is enormously artful and appealing.

Less successful in the present enterprise is June Duprez, who has the consequential role of Maggie Wylie. Irrespective of comparisons with the original performance of Maude Adams here, or that of Helen Hayes twenty years ago, she does not fire the play in its moments of latent dramatic enchantment. Although she has gone to some pains to disguise her pretty looks and plays the canny lady of wisdom with studied restraint, the effect is more wooden than captivating. There are moments when she fulfills the demands of a scene admirably, as those in which she confronts her bought and paid for husband with his infatuation for a vapid beauty, but there is little subtle shading or cumulative excitement in her portrayal.

* * *

The piece is most satisfying in comparatively minor episodes. Eva Le Gallienne, after a rather awkward start, carries off the Comptesse de la Briere with a delicately sly touch. Walter Hampden is good enough as Charles Venables, the elder statesman who accepts a newly elected M. P. on the good grounds that his wife is smart. Ernest Truex, Philip Bourneuf and Arthur Keegan lend colorful amusement to the parts of Maggie's kinsmen and Mary Alice Moore is properly dim-witted as Shand's inamorata. Margaret Webster has again employed her fine directorial talents to give the revival pace and fluency and the Paul Morrison settings and the costumes by David Ffolkes are delightful. "What Every Woman Knows" might have been treated better, but it retains much of its bloom in this second American Repertory Theater production.

The Sun

NOVEMBER 9, 1946

Barrie's 'What Every Woman Knows' Is Pleasantly Revived by A. R. T.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Those brave people of the American Repertory Theater, now plunged into a heavy schedule, turned last night from the grandeur of "Henry VIII" to the placidity of James M. Barrie and came through with a pleasant and generally satisfactory production of "What Every Woman Knows." The Scot's durable comedy is getting on, isn't it? It's been with us since 1908.

"What Every Woman Knows," staged by Margaret Webster, is now played in two acts. The tale of the managing and mothering Maggie Wylie and the sour, hard-headed John Shand, whose political success is made possible by Maggie's wisdom and shrewdness, has been one of the stage's most beguiling comedies through all these years. It was when Maude Adams first did it, and again in 1926 when it was played by Helen Hayes.

And it is now far better theater than the A. R. T.'s first offering, "Henry VIII," ever was or ever could be. But I fear that the placing of June Duprez in the role of Maggie presents a case of unfortunate miscasting.

It's not an easy one, that Maggie Wylie assignment, and certainly it is a tough one for a young player of Miss Duprez's limited stage experience. She is only intermittently effective in her characterization. She is quite too often, possessive and aggressive as the wife who teaches and tames the unsmiling John. The part calls for a softer more subtle, more expert portrayal. Miss Duprez, for all her alertness, is not quite up to it.

Richard Waring has considerably more success as John Shand, making a person of the moody, ambitious and humorless man who takes Maggie for his wife as a result of a bargain made with him by her watchful father and her adoring brothers. Eva LeGallienne has quite a good time playing the Comtesse and Walter Hampden scampers about agreeably as Charles Venables. Ernest Truex is a homey, jovial Alick Wylie and Philip Bourneuf and Arthur Keegan do well as the brothers.

The play has been skillfully staged by Margaret Webster. The American Repertory Theater is mounting its productions handsomely and the good scenery for the Barrie comedy was designed by Paul Morrison. David Folkes, who distinguished himself with the backgrounds for "Henry VIII," has done the costumes.

Next week in Columbus Circle: Ibsen's "John Gabriel Borkman."

New York Post

NOVEMBER 9, 1946

Repertory Theatre Continues With a Barrie Revival

By Richard Watts Jr.

As its second production, the American Repertory Theate is offering J. M. Barrie's "What Every Woman Knows," which is at least a very influential comedy. There were occasion last season, you may remember, when it appeared that most of the dramatists in America were bent on reworking its theme of the modest wife who was really responsible for her famous husband's success in life. Indeed, by the time "State of the Union" and "The Magnificent Yankee" had shown that both the leading liberal candidate for the Republican Presidential nomination and Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes actually owed it all to the little woman, every playgoing married man in town had developed an inferiority complex.

Comfort to Bachelors

The vogue of the Barrie idea proved just as comforting to the bachelors as it was disturbing to the husbands. If, as "What Every Woman Knows," and its horde of successors insisted, worldly success among the males was entirely due to the superior wit and intelligence of wives, unmarried men had received the cheerful news that if they were triumphant in life they had done it themselves, but, if failures, had the perfect excuse of lacking a helpmate. In both cases, it bucked them up no end.

On behalf of the properly grateful bachlors, I am happy to attest that the Barrie play has many scenes that still seem warm, human and quietly amusing. There is life in it yet, and a pleasant minimum of its author's too frequently cloying whimsies. Despite its charm, though, it is difficult to escape the impression that its central characters are remarkably annoying people, the heroine with her excess of bogus humility and the hero with his pompous stuffed-shirt tendencies.

Difficult Role

For the success of the play, it is necessary that the heroine, at least, be played with the most beguiling skill, lest she emerge as a rather depressing young woman. Playgoers with long memories will recall with delight the performance that Helen Hayes gave in the role in the last Broadway revival. It does not, however, require a vivid recollection of Miss Hayes' portrayal to see that, in the current presentation, the part makes excessive demands on the earnest talents of June Duprez.

As the husband, Richard Waring is more successful in a less demanding role. Miss Le Gallienne and Mr. Hampden have fun in their minor characterizations, Mary Alice Moore looks well as the semi-menace, and Philip Bourneuf continues to seem the most effective actor in the company. Unhappily, the American Repertory Theatre has not yet found itself.

The New York Times

NOVEMBER 9, 1946

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Sir James M. Barrie's humorous valentine to women is still pleasantly entertaining. For all its coyness, "What Every Woman Knows" still gives off disarming magic in the theatre. Not having produced a single play since Wednesday, the new American Repertory Theatre acted it at the International Theatre last evening. Put it down in the book as a cheerful evening in the theatre in the presence of a skillful comedy acted by an able and sociable company.

In all conscience a man must be permitted the satisfaction of a few reservations. For the late Sir James was a sentimental romantic redeemed by his neatness as a craftsman. Almost redeemed, that is: for every now and then "What Every Woman Knows" becomes too charming to be tolerated. Just when we are rippling along marvelously with the pawky humors of this comedy it blunders into a scene of bathos that leaves a theatregoer ashamed of himself. Everyone in the cast of characters is just a trifle too solemn, too shrewd, too knowing or too silly to be borne. And the prize Sir James offers to John Shand is such an egregious one—to make a speech at Leeds and be "taken up" by the Government. Alas, it is to be feared that Sir James had a philistine mind.

* * *

But those are the second and better thoughts of which the venerable and top-hatted Charles Venables speaks so approvingly. And they do not destroy the fact that "What Every Woman Knows" is original and amusing, with just enough human truth to be worth mulling over. Every man naturally should take violent exception to it.

After the panoply of "Henry VIII," the performance of the Barrie play begins to give us some notion about the capacity of this repertory company. Let it be said at once that the new company is going to be all right. Barring a few mawkish Barrieisms, particularly when the male Wylies are assembled, Margaret Webster's direction is lucid in outline and congenial in its pace. As the cunning Maggie Wylie, June Duprez is giving an excellent performance well balanced between personal modesty and guile. Probably Barrie intended the part to be more kittenish in the acting, but undoubtedly Miss Duprez is improving it.

* * *

Richard Waring is capital as John Shand—arrogant, humorless, surprisingly bewildered at the end when things in his life begin to go to pieces. As the impossibly sagacious Countess de la Briere, Miss Le Gallienne is overacting the worldliness and giving the effect of patronizing the whole cast with intellectual superiority. Mr. Hampden contributes a stuffy Charles Venables as the part is written—surprisingly without a title. Certainly he must have been on the King's List.

As the supercilious Lady Sybil, Mary Alice Moore is also giving a well-designed performance that acknowledges both the vanity and emptiness of that young woman. Ernest Truex, well-bearded, act Father Wylie much better than the Chamberalin in "Henry VIII," but not without a trace of superfluous gagging.

When the performance began, it looked for a moment. As though the actors were going to knock themselves out with their thick Scottish accents. Bert Lahr or Willie Howard seldom have broaden accents in knockabout skits. But as usually happens, the actors got to be more comfortably American as the play settled down.

Note, by the way, that Paul Morrison has done the sets competently, and that David Ffolkes designed the costumes imaginatively. On the whole, "What Every Woman Knows" is as good as reading an urbane novel by the fireside on a cold night with a scuttle of Bourbon near-by.

Journal-American

NOVEMBER 9, 1946

Barrie Play Revived

By ROBERT GARLAND

Last night, in its own International Theatre, the American Repertory Theatre again made manifest its internationalism by turning from William Shakespeare, or a fair-to-middling fascimile of him, to James Matthew Barrie at his sentimental best.

It was a real right turn, as right as rain is said to be.

So the news from the Circle called Columbus is to the effect that both Mr. Barrie and his oh-so-wholesome comedy hold up well after all the passing years since Charles Frohman fetched it to Broadway from overseas in honor of Maude Adams and to his own greater glory.

That, my children, was as far back as I am anxious to remember, as long ago as the night before the night before Christmas in the peacetime year of our theatre, 1908.

It goes without recalling that Miss Adams added to her own glory also as the Maggie Wylie who, a few short hours ago, was entrusted to the refugee from the Hollywoods now known as June Duprez.

Eighteen years later, which is two decades ago, Helen Hayes put Maggie up on-stage again and managed to keep her there for almost a hundred more performances than Maude Adams managed at the Empire.

And why not? For Maggie Wylie is of such stuff—and good, sound common sense—as infallible heroines are made.

* * *

Simply Sweet

It has been said, and on practically Shavian authority, that the Maggie Wylies of this world—and the theatre world as well—are as good as indestructible.

You just can not, as it were, go wrong with them!

Maude Adams did not, most certainly. Neither did Helen Hayes. And neither did June Duprez, who had a good try at her last night up near Central Park.

So simply sweet, so sweetly simple, so relentlessly strong, noble and understanding is the little woman that, I would not be surprised, Francis Renault could deal with her triumphantly without even putting on his wig.

Until Maggie did it all over again on the Circle called Columbus, you had more or less forgotten now, at 27 years of age and yearningly unmarried, sweetly simple and simply sweet the James Matthew Barrie creature is.

And how relentlessly strong, noble and understanding is her love—or maybe her devotion—for John Shand, who really is a prig in parliamentry clothing.

In him, she releases her affection for her three-man family—reading from left to right, they are Alick, David and James—with her pure but persistent reaching out for what every woman wants.

Which is, of course, a husband to play house with, just a great big boy-who-will-not-grow-up to guide, philosophize and befriend.

* * *

Warm Revival

As re-presented by the American Repertory Company up in its International Theatre, this "What Every Woman Knows" is as charming and nostalgic as it must have been down in the Empire in the theatrical season of 1908-1909.

That was the season of "Three Twins," "The Traveling Salesman," "Sporting Days," "The Fighting Hope," "A Gentleman From Mississippi," "The Blue Mouse," "Havana," "The Climax" and "The Midnight Sons," all of which out-ran it. And "The Ziegfeld Follies," "The Devil," "Savation Nell," "The Easiest Way" and "The Third Degree," which did not!

A prophet being without honor in the Drama Critics Circle, I would not be surprised if it out runs "Henry VIII" which, a couple of nights before, started the American Repertory Theatre on its way to fame, I know, and fortune, I pray.

Directed by Margaret Webster, who approaches Shakespeare without fears, it is a warm and welcome addition to this season of revivals. The distinguished cast is—distinguished!

But the outstanding acting comes from June Duprez as Maggie and Richard Waring as John Shand. But not, let me tell you, exactly in the order named...

So again, dear American Repertory Theatre, more and more power to you. I'll be seeing you Tuesday, when "John Gabriel Borkman" comes in.

PM

NOVEMBER 11, 1946

—*Kronenberger*—

Scotch With Sugar In It

PM Reviews

WHAT EVERY WOMAN KNOWS.

Surely one reason for Barrie's huge success is that, while he asked you on a very famous occasion to believe in fairies, he never really asked you to believe in human beings. What alone seemed important to him, as to Maggie Wylie in this play, was that they have charm. A capacity to beguile constitutes a capacity to bamboozle—and without even running the risk that people will howl "I've been robbed." The whole point, indeed, is that they *want* to be robbed, if it's disillusionment you're robbing them of. And if Barrie could make the wand of romance look like the scalpel of truth, if he could make people think he had discovered a great law of life instead of a great lure for matinee-goers, so much the better. What Barrie says every woman knows is, at any rate, what every woman is pleased to think, and every man afraid to—so how could Barrie go wrong?

Of course Sir James partly exculpated himself through never asking you to believe in human beings. He never set up as anything but a romantic writer, though it could be that he was not so much that as a canny Scot who wrote for a romantic public. He fed it sugar and spice and everything twice, and sometimes even gave it a bit of meat to chew on—the idea behind *The Admirable Crichton*, for instance.

It's impossible to do Barrie exact justice. Some people will always value his talents too much, and others too little; some people will always want to retch over the same thing that puts other people into raptures. I myself like *Crichton* a lot better (or thought so the last time I read it) than I do *What Every Woman Knows*, because its theme is livelier and its development makes for better theater. But—whatever the play—the whimsical warmth, the Charm with a capital C, the essential cautiousness, the irrepressible coyness always make me uncomfortable.

And yet, allowing for what is dated about *What Every Woman Knows* no less than for what is distasteful, it is a cleverly contrived and at times quite entertaining theater piece. Its mush wears like iron. Its two principal roles, preposterous in themselves but piquant in combination, are still there to be fattened up by any lady and gentleman who can cope with the assignment. The lady's assignment, if much the more rewarding, is also much the harder. How to be charming though plain, radiant though lustreless, lovable though wily—there's the rub. As a matter of fact when Maggie, at the end, was being comforting and forgiving and understanding to John, and making him feel small as hell, my wife whispered to me: "That's just what Mrs. Hickey got bumped off for in *The Iceman Cometh*."

Well, Maude Adams and Helen Hayes seem to have turned the trick. But June Duprez doesn't even play to it. Miss Duprez's is a tough assignment, and she should not be too harshly condemned for failing at it, but fail she does. Her Maggie, more than anything else that's wrong with her, is fatally uninteresting. Richard Waring's John Shand, on the other hand, is very well done and holds you all the way. As the Countess, Eva LeGallienne gets life into the play, and Philip Bourneuf does nicely as David Wylie.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

"Henry VIII"

The New York Times

NOVEMBER 7, 1946

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Out of an indifferent play the American Repertory Theatre has fashioned a memorable performance and a notable production. The play is "Henry VIII," partly by Shakespeare, partly by Fletcher, and the whole freely edited by Margaret Webster, who directed the performance acted at the International Theatre at Columbus Circle last evening.

As a play it lacks the imagery and vitality of Shakespeare and it is hardly more than a procession of woes and reports of court political knavery. But this is enough to give the new American Repertory Theatre entrance into the life of New York with hopes of a brave career. For the "Henry VIII" that Miss Webster has managed to patch together gives Eva Le Gallienne and Walter Hampden vehicles for some of the finest acting in their careers. And David Ffolkes, who hardly more than a year ago was dreaming of the theatre in a Jap prison labor camp, has designed one of the real magnificences of the modern stage. In lieu of a great play, this superb rendering of "Henry VIII" is enough.

* * *

Nothing is actually known about the history of this play, except that cannon used in the revelry scene burned down the Globe Theatre in 1613. According to scholars, some of it is authentic Shakespeare from the tired last years of an exhausting career; but most of it comes from other hands—Fletcher or Massinger or both. In uninflected historical form it presents some big scenes that might have occurred in the life of England's most uxorious monarch, but presents them without passion.

As things have worked out it is now serving the function of presenting to New York the varied talents of a repertory theatre which will open with a Barrie play on Friday and an Ibsen play next week. The presentation as accomplished last evening should be very much to the taste of New York. As Katherine of Aragon, Miss Le Gallienne is capping her career with one or two vividly acted scenes. Katherine, pleading her case fearlessly before her wayward husband and a disingenuous cardinal, gathers stature and nobility from Miss Le Gallienne's acting, and the scene of her death acquires poignancy from her neat artistic integrity.

* * *

Playing the sort of part that best becomes his talents, Mr. Hampden is wearing imposing costumes again and speaking Elizabethan verse with mastery of tone. His Cardinal Wolsey is one of his best works. Victor Jory gives an altogether admirable portrait of a vigorous, strong-headed though friendly minded Henry VIII. As the Duke of Buckingham, Richard Waring speaks triumphantly the moving charge to the people of the streets as he marches off to execution.

Unfortunately there is no time now to discuss in detail the acting of other members of an able and varied company, although something must be said in praise of Philip Bourneuf's lucid speaking voice as one of the chroniclers. If all the actors speak difficult verse uncommonly well, that is doubtless one of Miss Webster's versatile contributions. "Henry VIII," is not her best tribute to Shakespeare as a dramatist. But she has created a work of some pith and considerable moment out of the languid scenes of this routine script.

Since the dramatic narrative is tepid, Lehman Engel has almost made a dramatic concert out of his musical score. Of all the scores he has written for such occasions, this is the most complete and evocative. As designer of both scenery and costumes, Mr. Ffolkes has done work of which the whole modern theatre should be proud. It is as though he had poured into this pageant and show all the color and beauty pent up inside him during the years he was a war prisoner in the Orient.

In "Henry VIII" Shakespeare did not do half so well as some of his twentieth-century abettors in the first production of the American Repertory Theatre.

'HENRY VIII.'

Play by William Shakespeare; staged by Margaret Webster; scenery and costumes by David Ffolkes; music by Lehman Engel; dances arranged by Felicia Sorel; presented by the American Repertory Theater, Inc. Cheryl Crawford, managing director, at the International Theater Wednesday evening, November 6, 1946.

THE CAST:

Prologue	Philip Bourneuf
Duke of Buckingham	Richard Waring
Duke of Norfolk	Raymond Greenleaf
Lord Abergavenny	Robert Rawlings
Cardinal Wolsey	Walter Hampden
Cromwell	Eli Wallach
Sir Thomas Lovell	Emery Battis
Sergeant of Guard	William Windom
Henry VIII	Victor Jory
Duke of Suffolk	Efrem Zimbalist, Jr.
Katherine of Aragon	Eva Le Gallienne
Surveyor	Angus Cairns
Lord Chamberlain	Ernest Truex
Lord Sands	John Barber
Sir Harry Guildford	Arthur Keegan
Anne Bullen	June Duprez
Chronicler	Eugene Stockmann
Sir Nicholas Vaux	Donald Keyes
Cardinal Campeius	John Straub
Old Lady	Margaret Webster
Lady in Waiting	Ruth Neal
Earl of Surrey	William Windom
Archbishop of Canterbury	Theodore Tenley
Patience	Marion Evenson
Messenger	Robert Rawlings
Capucius	Eugene Stockmann
Duchess of Norfolk	Mary Alice Moore

Synopsis: London—1521 to 1533. Act I—Scene 1: Outside the Council Room. Scene 2: The Council Room at Whitehall Palace. Scene 3: A street. Scene 4: Wolsey's Palace at York House. Scene 5: Outside the Tower. Scene 6: The King's apartments. Scene 7: The Hall at Blackfriars. Act II—Scene 1: The Queen's apartments. Scene 2: The King's apartments. Scene 3: Westminster Abbey. Scene 4: A room in Kimbolton Abbey. Scene 5: Ante-room in the Palace. Scene 6: Outside the Palace at Greenwich.

The Sun

NOVEMBER 7, 1946

'Henry VIII' Is Richly Presented, Listless in Performance at International.

By WARD MORRHOUSE.

Just four blocks to the south of the site upon which the fabulous New Theater had its birth thirty-seven years ago, the American Repertory Theater began its New York career last night—began it courageously with Shakespeare's "Henry VIII" at the International. The presentation is richly beautiful, the project is one of importance and long-range promise, but the first performance is often listless.

"Henry VIII" is an unfamiliar chronicle play, and not truly representative of Shakespeare's genius. It has some grandeur, dignity and rhetorical power, but for all of its occasional excitement, for all of the limitless beauty bestowed upon it by our new producing organization, it is an unwieldy drama and often quite a dull one. And some of the players, particularly those in minor roles, haven't the voice or the spirit for the undertaking. I feel that the American Repertory Theater could have made a happier choice for its first production.

It is generally conceded that "Henry VIII" is a play written by Shakespeare with not little aid from John Fletcher. It is an ecclesiastical drama setting forth the execution of the Duke of Buckingham, the King's rejection of Queen Katherine, the downfall and dismissal of Cardinal Wolsey, the coronation of Anne Bullen, the death of Katherine and the birth of Elizabeth.

The dauntless Margaret Webster has subjected the text to some merciful editing. She has made her cuts and her minor rearrangments, tightening and compressing the drama into two acts and thirteen scenes. But there are still some interludes here and there that seem interminable. The production is never lacking in physical beauty, appropriate and imaginative designs in scenery and costumes having been contributed by David Ffolkes.

Philip Bourneuf, an able actor, gives the most impressive performance of the evening. He is the narrator and speaks with great precision and clarity. Eva LeGallienne plays the tortured and blameless Queen Katherine, a role that fell to Helena Mojeska, Ellen Terry and Edith Wynne Matthison in other years. Miss LeGallienne is better in her early scenes than in her final ones—at her best and brilliant, in her clashes with the vicious Wolsey, and in the trial scene in Blackfriars Hall.

Walter Hampden, now in a part that has served noted actors from Edwin Booth to Herbert Beerbohm Tree, makes something of a melodramatic villain of the crafty and demoniacal old Cardinal, but he is extraordinarily effective in his final moments, showing Wolsey as a shattered and pathetic figure. Victor Jory has a lot of vigor as the lusty and bulky King Henry. June Duprez isn't very successful with the negligible role of Anne Bullen, and Ernest Truex, playing the Lord Chamberlain, seems hardly to belong to the proceedings at all. Richard Waring is eloquent and moving as Buckingham in his hour of doom.

"Henry VIII" has pictorial splendor upon the stage of the International, but it is not a drama of soaring Shakespearean verse and it does not show the new company at its best. The American Repertory Theater is, however, an organization of high purpose and promise and more stimulating offerings are to be expected from it as the season goes along.

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 7, 1946

'Henry VIII' Launches New Repertory Group

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The American Repertory Theater came to rich life last night with its initial performance of Shakespeare's "Henry VIII." This production promises a vital transfusion into the bloodstream of American theater.

"Henry VIII" is a most appropriate start for the repertory company. Despite its passion and color it is not the sort of play likely to be successful as a single commercial production.

It has, however, plenty of excitement and brilliance to make it an enticing element in a varied program such as ART has scheduled.

This work is in every sense a chronicle and a pageant before it is a play. A lot of devious history is covered, but succinctly. Background and motives are supplied by chroniclers. Little but the climaxes are acted out.

Stark Dramatic Peaks.

The characters appear in light characterizing moments, then the juice of their beings is squeezed out for stark dramatic peaks.

As usual under Margaret Webster's directing hand the work is done with great respect and little awe. The King's perfidy is exposed in a swift, gracefully flowing spectacle.

Through all the royal pomp there stays in the memory a keen and touching portrait of Queen Katherine as played by Eva Le Gallienne. There is nobility, tenderness, pride and heartbreak in her performance.

Katherine must be a role every actress covets. She is a progressing figure, and for her great moments the crowded stage becomes a frame for her.

Real Distinction.

Miss Le Gallienne has real distinction in the moving court scene. A subdued figure between the two high facing thrones, she dominates the King and the Cardinal in all their magnificence, as she pleads against the divorce Henry is forcing on her.

Her death scene is deeply tragic. Here is indeed a lonely broken Queen, but a gentlewoman whose last request is for her courtiers.

Walter Hampden has a keen perception of the Cardinal. His Wolsey is not so much a rank villain as a ruthlessly successful man in his calling according to the dictates of his times. You feel that his conscience would have never known remorse if his schemings had continued to succeed.

Mr. Hampden's biggest scene is great. Realization of his downfall is slow. At first it seems intellectual and objective. Then as its true significance comes over him, there is a bitter, utter disintegration of a maniacally ambitious man.

Youthful Vigor.

The King himself is less of a role than either of these, and Victor Jory plays him with a youthful vigor that seems to flaunt the traditional idea of the indulgent monarch.

His appearance is sated, and his manner is petulant and spoiled. He is robust, ruthless and certainly lustful in his meeting with Anne Boleyn. With all that there is somehow missing a quality of physical gravity.

Philip Bourneuf gives a virile and intelligible continuity to the pageant, as the Prologue and later as the First Chronicler. His explanations pick up a burden from the author, the players and the audience. He drives them home clearly, patiently and quickly.

Richard Waring invests the short-lived Buckingham with nobility and a reasoning bitterness. He is a striking figure of a tempered fanatic bidding farewell to his friends as he moves toward his execution.

Decoratively Innocent.

June Duprez is decoratively innocent as Anne, and Ernest Truex makes the Lord Chamberlain dry and humorous. Raymond Greenleaf is imposing as the Duke of Norfolk, and Margaret Webster offers a lusty moment or two as an old woman.

The American Repertory Theater indulges in no garish weighty spectacle, nor has it any suggestion of the sleaziness of harassed stock companies. David Ffolkes gives the production beauty and glow without ever letting his colors distract from the essential moving pageant.

The vaulted hall of Wolsey's palace suggests great spaciousness, and the court room severe majesty. The coronation scene has a dreamlike splendor, then the cathedral is a pale echo in color for Katherine's vision.

ART is off to a most auspicious start.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

NOVEMBER 7, 1946

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

Off to a Good Start

THE American Repertory Theater gives certain tokens of its integrity and artistry in the inaugural offering of the company, "Henry VIII." The Shakespeare drama is not a particularly felicitious choice for revival. As the prologue forewarns, it is full of state and woe as it describes how mightiness meets misery. Still, under Webster's masterly direction and with a balanced and zealous performance, this is an articulate and sometimes luminous production of a lesser classic at the International Theater. The state of a latter-day feudal squabble is expressed in scenes of striking pageantry. The woe is distilled in passages of restrained and moving eloquence.

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To Miss Webster must go the chief credit for freeing the work from academic dry-rot. She has shaped the play to two acts of swiftly changing scenes, interpolating excerpts from Holinshead's Chronicles to give clarity and an effect of dramatic fluency and unity to the proceedings. As in the past, she has made the Shakespeare poetry audible, unstilted and communicative and the action significantly moving. If the frequent monologues of the chroniclers, as they try to elucidate the complexities of the plot, take up an unconscionable time, that is an inherent flaw of a drama, the authorship of which is somewhat dubious.

With what it has had at hand the American Repertory Theater has done well indeed. Any suspicion of scene-stealing by an assemblage of celebrated thespians was unfounded. Eva Le Gallienne dominates this first production inevitably, as she gives a sensitive portrayal of the proud, sad Katharine, whose happiness is forfeited in a struggle between a cardinal and a king. She brings a splendid and sorrowful dignity to the part which makes it glow alike in the pomp of the trial scene and in her modest abbey retreat. Walter Hampden plays Wolsey with a sly malevolence which grows somewhat trying in the early scenes, but his fall is majestic when Henry strips him of his powers.

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Then there is Richard Waring, contributing an interlude of tragic splendor in the role of Lord Buckingham, as he is led to his execution outside the tower. It is a small part in the play as a whole, but it has immense power and it has been framed in proper theatrical accents. Ernest Truex accepts the minor assignment of Lord Chamberlain and manages to wrest fleeting humor from it. Victor Jory is regally ominous as the Henry who alone escapes the misery attendant upon a palace cabal and June Duprez is a comely Ann Bullen, who has a short-lived triumph by becoming queen. There are other competent performances, including those of Philip Bourneuf, Efrem Zimbalist jr., Eli Wallach and Miss Webster herself, in a fleeting scene, where she, as an old woman, counsels the ascendant Ann. "Henry VIII" is a desultory entertainment, even with the shrewd Webster amendments. The company and production make one attend subsequent offerings with high hopes.

Journal American

NOVEMBER 7, 1946

'Henry VIII' Revived At International

Dear Cheryl Crawford:

Tonight being THE night, please, if it's not overly presumptuous of me, may I herewith offer you, as managing director, and your fellow members of The American Repertory Theatre my best wishes and heartfelt congratulations at this, the beginning, I hope to St. Genisius, of a long, prosperous unsullied theatrical career?

We who love the theatre and everything the theatre stands for —and there're more of us than Broadway imagines—need you as much as you need us. It's this need, and its mutual appeasement, that will, in the long run, keep everybody well and happy on both sides of the footlights . . . In other, and less fancy, words, good luck and God bless you!

ROBERT GARLAND.

Nov. 6, 1946.

By ROBERT GARLAND

Well, THE night referred to in yesterday's private letter, here publically printed without permission, is over. Beginning this evening, up in Columbus Circle, The American Repertory Theatre can settle down to business. And, as I wouldn't be surprised, Cheryl Crawford, Eva Le Gallienne and Margaret Webster; Victor Jory, Walter Hampden and Richard Waring; Ernest Truex, Philip Bourneuf and June Duprez, are none too sorry.

Getting this American Repertory Theatre together has been a man-sized undertaking. Assembling the sponsors, from "A." which is Diana Adrian, of New York, to "Z," which is Mary Zimbalist, of Philadelphia. And the players, two dozen of whom are in the program. And the directors, who, so far, are Miss Webster and Miss Le Gallienne. And the designer, who is David Pfolkes. And the choreographer, who is Felicia Sorel.

And the thousand-and-three other people who had to be hired, fired or otherwise consulted, from general manager, press representative and music impresario, through stage-managers, assistant stage-managers and patron-secretaries, to carpenters, electricians and propertymen. And a solitary flyman. And, the plays, "Henry VIII." And "What Every Woman Knows." And "John Gabriel Borkman."

The Barrie comedy makes its bow tomorrow. The Ibsen drama shows up Tuesday. And, in good time, Shaw's "Androcles and the Lion" and Sheridan's "School For Scandal."

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Semi-Shakespeare

Last night's repertory opener was "Henry VIII," which isn't all Shakespeare and isn't all good. So little do some of the best Shakespearian authorities think of it that E. M. W. Tillyard, in his authorative "Shakespeare's History Plays," dismisses it with a few unkind, well chosen words. He, too, is not convinced that William wrote the thing at all. Even up in Columbus Circle, Rafael Holinshead is given collaborative credit.

Which, I fancy, explains why it has been—and is, for which I'm not too sorry—infrequently revived. In my time, I've seen only Sir Herbert Tree's reproduction, first in London on a coronation year, then here at the New Amsterdam after the crowning of George V as King of England and all the rest of it. Then, it was a spectacle rather than a play, ending with Ann Bullen's ascension to the throne in a Westminster Abbey not readily forgotten.

After last night's revival, which is a play rather than a spectacle and no great play at that, I can either take my "Henry VIII" or let it lay up on my library shelf. After last night's restaging at the International Theatre, I've had my "Henry VIII" for this decade. After last night's restaging by The American Repertory Theatre, I more than ever wonder why it, of all Shakespearian pieces, was chosen as the new company's opening attraction.

Even so, it was, is, and will be worth the seeing. To have revived it at all required courage, imagination and integrity. Which is to say, Cheryl, Eva and Margaret!

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Enter Elizabeth

Miss Webster, who specializes in staging Shakespeare without fears, has walked up to "Henry VIII" and rearranged it nearer to her heart's desire. She has streamlined it into a triangular melodrama with Boy Henry wedding Girl Katherine of Aragon, Boy Henry divorcing Girl Katherine of Aragon, and Boy Henry wedding Girl Ann Bullen, who presents him with a bouncing baby at the curtain's final fall. Her name's Elizabeth!

And, although invisible stagehands plotted visibly against the evening's undertaking, the metropolitan premiere of The American Repertory Theatre came off with colors flying and an appreciative audience applauding players, production and play. And in the order named. St. Genisius has a way of looking after his own. Last night, he blessed them all and let his light shine expectantly upon them.

But this can be returned to later on. Suffice it now to report that the Katherine of Aragon of Miss Le Gallienne is masterly; that the Henry VIII of Victor Jory is first-rate; that the Cardinal Wolsey of Walter Hampden is Hampdenian, that the Ann Bullen of June Duprez does credit to a refugee from Hollywood, that the Buckingham of Richard Waring is in the true tradition and that the Lord Chamberlain of Ernest Truex is not . . .

"Henry VIII" will be repeated tonight . . . Which provides evidence that The American Repertory Theatre has started successfully on its long, prosperous and unsullied career. More, and even more, power to it!

New York Post

NOVEMBER 7, 1946

American Repertory Theatre Starts With 'Henry VIII'

By Richard Watts Jr.

The American Repertory Theatre, which has high ambitions and lofty purposes, began its life's work last night with a colorful production of the Shakespearean chronicle play, "Henry VIII," staged by Margaret Webster with a proper accent on the pageantry involved. In the cast were Eva Le Gallienne as Katherine, Walter Hampden as Wolsey, Victor Jory as Henry, June Duprez as Ann and Philip Bourneuf as a combination of the prologue, Cranmer and Holinshead's Chronicles. It was a worthy and hopeful occasion, but, I am afraid, not a very exciting one.

For one thing, there is the melancholy fact that "Henry VIII," whether it was written by Shakespeare, Fletcher or Francis Bacon, is among the least rewarding of the plays bearing the Shakespearean name. Miss Webster has acknowledged this inescapable conclusion, just as the author did, by going in extensively for the coronations, baptisms and other court ceremonies indicated in the text, and, aided by the picturesque and atmospheric costumes and settings of David Ffolkes, she has done excellently by them. The current "Henry" serves well enough as a spectacle.

Katherine and Wolsey

Obviously, it has its merits as a play, too. The characters of the discarded Queen Katherine and the ambitious Cardinal Wolsey have vigor and intensity, and the King, himself, until the playwright rather forgets about him in the process of contemplating the downfall of the Queen and the Cardinal, has a sort of pleasant animal vitality. Several of the scenes continue to have a strong dramatic interest, particularly the execution of the Duke of Buckingham, the trial of Katherine, and the downfall of Wolsey. All of these are the Shakespearean chronicle at its best.

It is difficult to deny, though, that most of the remaining characters and episodes are inclined to be dull, undramatic and lacking in the fire, eloquence and insight of the Bard in full flight. Nor can this be blamed on our knowledge that the pundits insist it was Fletcher rather than Shakespeare who wrote most of the chronicle of King Henry, since these very same pundits add that such superior passages as those dealing with the death of Buckingham and the remorse of Wolsey are attributable to Fletcher.

The truth is that Miss Webster, in her interesting book, "Shakespeare Without Tears," confesses cheerfully that "Henry VIII" is not among the most stirring works of her favorite dramatist; that it is, in fact, a very pedestrian play to be set down as an achievement of the titanic genius who wrote "Hamlet" and "King Lear." Although Queen Katherine's death scene, which she admires, did not come off so well last night, Miss Webster is clearly not blind to the limitations of the drama that she has directed.

Pageantry

It is to her credit that she has given it the life and movement that she seems always able to impart to her Shakespearean presentations, and that the pageantry is less stuffy and self-conscious and more vivid than is customary. She has not, however, been able to make all of her actors properly impressive.

It seemed to me that the best work was in the minor roles, with Richard Waring, as Buckingham, and, in particular, the invariably skillful Philip Bourneuf, as the man who tells what is going on, being strikingly effective. The others appeared less happy.

Miss Le Gallienne, for example, was excellent in her denunciation of Wolsey, and, although she hardly suggests the "poor, weak woman" she calls Katherine, she was admirable until she came to the death scene. I did not think she showed at exactly her best there. As for Mr. Hampden, he did Wolsey's remorse scene with the proper dignity, but made less of the Cardinal in the earlier episodes. Mr. Jory was not a very impressive Henry, and Miss Duprez, whose role of Ann is just a bit, at least looked well in the part.

With the best will in the world, it cannot be said that the American Repertory Company got off to the most exhilirating of starts

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PM

NOVEMBER 8, 1946

Kronenberger

A New Group In an Old Play

PM Reviews

Even though Broadway—what with this season's unending revivals—is beginning to look like a museum, nothing is more needed on our stage than a permanent company devoted to the classics. Now the American Repertory Theatre has arrived to be just that, and everybody must wish it well. No doubt it is fitting, too, that it should start off with something by Shakespeare—or, at any rate, partly by Shakespeare; and if *Henry VIII* is far from an exciting choice, at least it is not a conventional one. It holds the boards as rarely now as it once—when every great performer craved to be a Wolsey or a Katherine—held them regularly.

It is only for those two roles, certainly, that it merits being played at all. The trouble with *Henry VIII* is not that it is a second-rate play—*Richard III* is a very second-rate play, but it can make fascinating theater. The real trouble with *Henry VIII* is that it isn't a play at all. It is concerned with personages that successively collide rather than with interests that gradually coalesce. Even taking it as Katherine's play, it is too late in starting and too soon ended. Actually, *Henry VIII* is a certain amount of history eked out with a certain amount of pageantry, injecting drama where it can, invoking rhetoric where it chooses, and topping the whole thing off with the tinsel about Elizabeth. It is a pastiche of materials and a get-together of playwrights: Fletcher and possibly Massinger had more to do with it than Shakespeare.

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The version that Margaret Webster has made of the play probably does as much for it as can be done. Miss Webster has thrown out a lot of dead or dawdling matter; she has torn out the whole Cranmer episode by the roots; she has focussed things where possible on Katherine; and she has not stinted on spectacle. Most of *Henry VIII* still jerks rather than moves, but at least it does not come to a complete standstill; and using excerpts from Holinshed as connective tissue, Miss Webster brings a certain clarity of story-telling to a certain forthrightness of direction. Physically, too, this production is handsome: David Ffolkes' decor and costumes help make the pageantry the best part of the play.

But this often listless play has the acting to contend with. Philip Bourneuf, who serves as chronicler, speaks for the most part with distinction, and Richard Waring makes a pleasant Buckingham. But all the big parts fail to come off right. Victor Jory seems willing to settle for a Henry VIII who is merely lusty, without quite being able to make him seem so, and without any ear for Elizabethan speech. Walter Hampden's Wolsey is handsomely wooden, all studied effect to no effect—and is there anything noisier than Mr. Hampden when he is *underplaying*?

As for Miss LeGallienne's Katherine, it is only fair to say that it had, at times, a good deal of force. But it got it partly through the wrong method of attack: the spitting, snarling Queen of the trial scene was not Katherine at all. Mrs. Siddons told the ailing Dr. Johnson that she considered Katherine the most pleasing of Shakespeare's heroines; and Dr. Johnson agreed with her. But what would make her so is a high pride and queenliness joined to submissiveness and sweetness; and Miss LeGallienne never succeeded in joining them. Her Katherine accordingly had little pathos. Apropos of that, much of her pathos lies in her feeling that she is an unbefriended stranger in a foreign land. Now Katherine, we know from contemporary sources, spoke English with a heavy accent; and I think she really needs something of one in the play, to help bring home her isolation and her loneliness. —LOUIS KRONENBERGER

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 7, 1946

American Repertory Theatre in Heartening Bow with 'Henry VIII'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The long-planned, hard-won American Repertory Theatre made its debut last evening at the International Theatre—made it, as a repertory company should, by presenting a Shakespeare drama. The debut was, I think, a heartening one, for the play was a crisp, clean and handsome production of "Henry VIII."

Margaret Webster, co-founder Cheryl Crawford and Eva Le Gallienne of the ART, has again shown her director's and editor's skill in making the involvements of the Elizabethan drama appear quite effortless. The company as a whole is satisfactory, and the performances of Miss Le Gallienne, Walter Hampden, Victor Jory and Richard Waring are admirable.

This chronicle of the eighth Henry is the story of a woman wronged—of Henry's queen, Katherine of Aragon, who is put aside for the fresher enticements of Ann Bullen (Anne Boleyn). It relates also the connivery of Cardinal Wolsey and his final undoing. In these roles Miss Le Gallienne and Mr. Hampden have the finest scenes of the drama—she as an outraged woman fighting in court, and again as a beaten, dying one; he as a repentant prelate who in one moment is dashed from the height of power to a crushing defeat.

A Vigorous Portrait.

Mr. Jory, looking much like the portraits of Henry, presents a vigorous monarch and June Duprez a handsome Ann. Mr. Waring has a fine moment as the about-to-be-executed Duke of Buckingham, and the other lords of Henry's court include Raymond Greenleaf and Ernest Truex.

The physical attractions of the production are considerable, for the settings and costumes have been admirably designed by David Ffolkes. The scenery has the required number of curtains and archways to accommodate the restless Shakespeare, but it also includes several handsome and colorful full-stage pictures and one — the divorce hearing — which is dramatic in itself.

There is quite a bit of incidental music by Lehman Engel. I suppose it is all right and in the tradition and all that, but I'm getting a little weary of the baleful horn-tooting composers habitually associate with costume drama.

The first-night audience gave the American Repertory Theatre an encouraging welcome. After the performance Miss Le Gallienne recalled the days of another repertory project—her own Civic Repertory on 14th St.—and Miss Webster (who has a bit as a humorous old lady in the performance) said, with disarming earnestness, "We have a long way to go and a lot to learn."

The American Repertory can, indeed, go a long way—and it has made a very good start. Tomorrow it will launch its second venture, Barrie's "What Every Woman Knows"; its third, Ibsen's "John Gabriel Borkman," will appear next week.

"Park Avenue"

The Sun

NOVEMBER 5, 1946

Max Gordon Presents 'Park Avenue,' Lavish Musical Comedy at the Shubert.

Max Gordon has presented the town with a lavish and smartly dressed new musical comedy in "Park Avenue," which he placed upon the stage of the Shubert Theater last evening. He has not, however, added greatly to the general gayety hereabouts.

That this is so is surprising, for the book of "Park Avenue" is the joint work of those tried and true jesters, Nunnally Johnson and George S. Kaufman. It is divorce which they have placed upon their anvil this time, and they do raise some comic sparks as they whack away at the subject and at those members of the Long Island set who favor frequent excursions to Reno, but they hardly send off a sufficient number to cover a whole evening.

Their plot idea is sound enough. Into the midst of a family of many marriages, they bring an ex-G. I. from South Carolina, where divorces are taboo. As he arrives on Long Island to wed a wealthy girl he has met during the war, he is considerably taken aback when he learns that the husband of his mother-in-law-to-be is No. 4 on the list and that the predecessors and their latest wives have all been invited to the ceremony.

In developing their theme Messrs. Johnson and Kaufman have concentrated on bright and pat quips, all very much alike, rather than on comic inventions in their story and their little joke about scrambled families wears woefully thin long before 11 o'clock rolls around. As a result "Park Avenue," after a brisk start, runs down hill, and the second act has less to offer than the first.

Ira Gershwin in his lyrics has contributed vastly more to the evening's fun than have the authors of the book. When three of the wives are singing of their troubles in the fields of hair-dos, fur coats, and nail polish in "Don't Be a Woman If You Can"; when the quartet of husbands, to a South American rhythm, is proclaiming that this is a "Land of Opportunity," and when Leonora Corbett is burlesquing cowboy songs in "Sweet Nevada" and riming "horseback" with "divorce back," "Park Avenue" is at its best. Arthur Schwarz's score as a whole, however, is neither distinctive nor memorable.

An excellent cast works hard all evening to put the show across. It is difficult to imagine any pair more perfect for the key parts of the bride's scatter-brained mother and her fourth husband than Miss Corbett and Arthur Margetson, but even they aren't always able to keep matters gay. Mary Wickes, as delightfully droll as ever, makes as much as she can of the slight role of the present wife of the bride's father, amusingly done by Raymond Walburn, and in the wives' song she is a delight. Ray McDonald and Martha Stewart make an attractive pair as the harassed youngsters.

Mr. Gordon has given "Park Avenue" a sumptuous production and Donald Oenslager's settings furnish an eye-filling background. The evening just won't add up, however, to the hilarious affair that everybody so obviously intended. HERRICK BROWN.

'PARK AVENUE.'

Musical comedy with book by Nunnally Johnson and George S. Kaufman; lyrics by Ira Gershwin; music by Arthur Schwartz; book staged by Mr. Kaufman; dances and musical numbers by Helen Tamiris; production supervised by Arnold Saint Subber; setting and lighting by Donald Oenslager; costumes by Tina Leser; musical conductor, Charles Sanford; orchestration by Don Walker; presented by Max Gordon at the Shubert Theater Monday evening, November 4, 1946.

THE CAST

Carlton	Byron Russell
Ted Snell	Ray McDonald
Madge Bennett	Martha Stewart
Ogden Bennett	Arthur Margetson
Mrs. Sybil Bennett	Leonora Corbett
Charlie Cromwell	Robert Chisholm
Mrs. Kim Cromwell	Martha Errolle
Reggie Fox	Charles Purcell
Mrs. Myra Fox	Ruth Matteson
Richard Nelson	Raymond Walburn
Mrs. Betty Nelson	Mary Wickes
Ted Wilson	Harold Medina
Mrs. Louis Wood	Dorothy Bird
James Meredith	William Skipper
Mrs. Beverly Meredith	June Mann
Mr. Meredith	David Thayer
Freddie Coleman	Wilson Smith
Carole Beauregard	Virginia Gordon
Brenda Stokes	Adelle Nazey
Brenda Fullerton	Sherry Shadburne
Brenda Fullerton-Stokes	Carol Chandler
Brenda Fullerton-Stokes-Fullerton	Betty Ann Lynn
Brenda Cadwallader	Kyle MacDonald
Brenda Stuyvesant	Eileen Coffeen
Brenda Caldwell	June Graham
Brenda Caldwell-Carlisle	Betty Low
Brenda Kerr	Virginia Morris
Brenda Kay-Kee-Kay	Judi Bloeps
Brenda Quilter Adams	Glenn Anders
Brenda Wright, Jr., Sr., 3rd	Margaret Gibson

SYNOPSIS: The home of Mrs. Ogden Bennett, Long Island. Act I, the terrace, lunch time. Act II, the drawing room, dinner time.

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 5, 1946

'Park Avenue' Has Its Moments

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

With all the well-known names on the credit list of "Park Avenue," an audience might expect a really smart and glittering musical comedy. For too much of the time it is far from being just that.

Nunnally Johnson and George S. Kaufman have written about a group of multimarried sophisticates. They are identical in manner and habit. The one subject they joke about or even discuss is divorce.

There are certainly a number of extremely witty comments on the matter of casting off wives and husbands. But the sum total is the violent m ..reatment of a lonely gag.

The dialogue sounds like a single section of a classified joke book. The humor of being callous about divorce is tossed in the air, kicked under foot, slammed against the wall and generally clubbed to death.

Leonora Corbett Stars.

The result is that the characters become trifling bores, and the whole proceeding distasteful. It is climaxed by an utterly unsavory final sequence.

This is a pity because the show is certainly not without its moments.

Leonora Corbett is starred as the most married of the ladies. She is lovely looking and an artful comedienne who can purr a line with comic effect. She is at her weakest in the pure musical comedy sequences, for she has less voice than ardor for singing and her pantomime to musical tempo is awkward.

Co-starred is Arthur Margetson as her present and precarious husband. He has little to do except toss off a wisecrack or two and join in a few songs.

As this pair's daughter, who would like to marry and make it stick, Martha Stewart comes through with flying colors. She is lovely looking, the kind of blue eyed, dimpled ingenue this sort of show needs. They seem too often to go from chorus lines to Hollywood and stay there.

She Gives Songs a Break.

Arthur Schwartz and his score should both be grateful to Miss Stewart, too. For she almost alone of the cast sings musically enough to give a song any kind of a break. Her "No Holding M's" and "Goodbye to All That" are what you remember.

Raymond Walburn lends his vague and wide eyed clowning to the first of Miss Corbett's husbands. His earnest successors are played by Robert Chisholm and Charles Purcell.

Mary Wickes is her earthy clowning self as one of their wives, and Ruth Matteson and Marthe Errolle are exquisite mates for the other two. The three girls stop the show with their "Don't Be a Woman If You Can."

Ray McDonald is a light footed and wistful young suitor for the daughter of this mixed up family, and David Wayne is a vigorous attorney.

Fresh Choreography.

The most vital moments in "Park Avenue" are provided by Helen Tamiris, who directed the dances. She picks striking girls and gives them fresh and amusing choreography.

The dance in the courtroom is original and economical in its satire, and both the calypso and "Echo" numbers are vivid. The Schwartz music for the last creates a disturbing mood of nostalgia and conflict.

As the leaders of the dances Dorothy Bird and Joan Mann are lively cavorting personalities.

Tina Leser's costumes are usually dazzling, occasionally grotesque. The girls of the ensemble are strictly in the former classification, and all told they make a lot more pleasant noises than the principals.

New York Post

NOVEMBER 5, 1946

Divorce Set Is Laughed At In Bright Musical Comedy

By Richard Watts Jr.

In addition to being an eminent Hollywood hierarch, an intermittent contributor to fiction and the stage, and one of the first wits of his time, Nunnally Johnson is a Southerner. It would be too much to say that his hot Dixie blood boils as he contemplates the lofty attitude sometimes taken toward his part of the country by supercilious Yankees, but their fatuous misconceptions have from time to time brought him scornful amusement, and he apparently decided on some good-humored retaliation. The result is "Park Avenue," a bright and amusing musical show which he has written with such admirable collaborators as George S. Kaufman, Ira Gershwin and Arthur Schwartz.

Since "Park Avenue" is concerned with laughing at the antics of the wealthy divorce set in this vicinity, it is, of course, fair and at least passably familiar game for any satirist. What gives it the mark of Mr. Johnson's special touch is that it places in comic opposition to the interchanging husbands and wives of New York and Reno an earnest young man from South Carolina, where there are no divorces, and indicates that he is as much badgered by his future mother-in-law's rather curious ideas about his homeland as by the thought of a constant succession of fathers-in-law.

The social satire in the new musical show is neither savage nor particularly incisive, but it does permit the Messrs. Johnson and Kaufman to look about them at the various eccentricities of the wealthy and pampered and laugh at them without any malice but also without many reservations. It certainly cannot be held that they regard their much divorced characters with moral disapproval, for it isn't that kind of show. It merely makes them look a bit childish and idiotic in a rather endearing sort of way and lets it go at that.

The best thing about the book of "Park Avenue" is that it is amusing and frequently witty in its talk and that it avoids most of the cliches of the conventional musical show. Its less happy feature is that it is sometimes just a trifle slender and that it has a tendency to press its one theme perhaps a bit insistently. It is assuredly above average, though.

It also has the advantage of an excellent comic character. The scatter-brained and charmingly imbecilic mother, who is its central figure, is a remarkably engaging lady, with her passion for changing husbands while she is still fond of them, her belief that getting divorces is virtually a moral duty and her firm conviction that she is very noble and sacrificial about her daughter. It is a good role and it is played with humor, spirit and style by Leonora Corbett, who is every bit as good in it as she was in "Blithe Spirit."

Music and Lyrics

The music and lyrics are bright and smart enough to be of proper help to the occasion. I think the Messrs. Gershwin and Schwartz are at their best in a wonderful pseudo-calypso number about how easy it is for millionaires to make money. There is another good number about the sad lives ladies of fashion live, and two excellent songs called "Goodbye to All That" and "The Dew Was on the Rose."

The production and the dancing are of assistance. Ray McDonald, the juvenile, is an excellent dancer as well as an agreeable young hero, and of the others I think I would single out Dorothy Bird for special praise. Donald Oenslager's sets are gay and colorful, and, as for the costumes, I would say after hesitation that some are fine and some a bit curious.

Although Miss Corbett dominates the evening, that admirable comedian, Arthur Margetson, again shows his gift for playing debonairly elegant gentlemen with real humor. There are likewise funny performances by Raymond Walburn and Robert Chisholm, while Martha Stewart, Marthe Errolle, Ruth Matteson and Mary Wickes play Park Avenue ladies engagingly.

"Park Avenue" is no satirical masterpiece, but it is a likeable and lively musical show.

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 5, 1946

'Park Avenue' Smartly Mounted, Tuneful and Disappointingly Dull

By JOHN CHAPMAN

All of the people connected with Max Gordon's new musical, "Park Avenue," including the pixy chorus girl with red hair, are more than ordinarily talented, so the show has a number of very nice qualities. It is surprising, considering everybody's ability, that this new offering at the Shubert Theatre isn't some kind of milepost in the music-show trade.

It has some excellent tunes and lyrics by Arthur Schwartz and Ira Gershwin, it is delightfully costumed and set and it is funny at moments when the authors, Nunnally Johnson and George S. Kaufman, put their heads together and come up with a smart, swift joke or a neat little whimsey. But in between—a very long in between—it is a thin and quite labored satire on the marriage-and-divorce habit in the New York social set.

A nice Southern boy loves a nice Park Avenue girl. But the girl's family is so mixed up, what with her mother having had four husbands and yearning for a fifth, and with all of the husbands in turn having had a number of wives and being in the market for more—well, what with all this the boy and girl don't know what to make of life. Neither do I.

How About Hollywood?

So, when the dancers aren't dancing and the singers aren't singing, "Park Avenue" offers endless and rather repetitive variations upon an unexciting theme. I, for one, believe that out where Mr. Johnson comes from, which is Hollywood, the divorce rate is probably higher and undoubtedly louder and funnier than it is among the less wealthy snobs of New York.

Leonora Corbett and Arthur Margetson, both expert at polite comedy, head the cast of this drawing-room exercise—which, in view of its title, is somewhat confusingly set on Long Island. Miss Corbett is an airy aristocrat to whom marriage means little and Mr. Margetson is her fourth spouse. Miss Corbett's life has been a happy one, for she believes—and says so in an amusing song—that the secret of blissful wedlock is to get a divorce while the dew is still on the rose.

The pleasant companions of Miss Corbett and Mr. Margetson include Raymond Walburn, Robert Chisholm, Marthe Errolle, Charles Purcell, Ruth Matteson and Mary Wickes, with Martha Scott and Ray McDonald, as the youngsters, being the only ones who believe in holy wedlock. It is a good company.

Lively Songs, Anyhow.

Schwartz and Gershwin seem to be livelier than Johnson and Kaufman, and their musical numbers are excellent. There is a rousing one, "Sweet Nevada," about the joys of divorce in that state; a funny one for the principal women, "Don't Be a Woman If You Can"; another funny one for the men, "Land of Opportunitee," and a pleasant kidding of Oscar Hammerstein's "My Son" lyric from "Carousel" titled "My Son-in-Law."

Helen Tamiris has staged some deft and out-of-the-ordinary dances, the best of which is a scene in a Nevada divorce court. The costumes by Tina Leser and Mainbocher's dresses for Miss Corbett are top stuff, and Donald Oenslager's two sets are excellent. Everything about "Park Avenue" is, indeed, in good taste—such very good taste that last evening I couldn't help wishing somebody would liven up the party by doing a prattfall.

Journal-American

NOVEMBER 5, 1946

'Park Avenue' Opens at Shubert

By ROBERT GARLAND

Last night, while Park Avenue went to the Horse Show, Broadway went to "Park Avenue." The "Park Avenue" to which Broadway went is Max Gordon's latest, if not greatest, musical-comedy production and Leonora ("Blithe Spirit") Corbett and Arthur ("Around the World") Margetson are its justly-celebrated leading players.

But there just isn't enough joke to eke out the evening in this song-and-dance concoction which has finally got to town. Maybe it wasn't a very good joke in the first place. Most certainly it is insufficiently robust to support a musical-comedy with a dozen-and-a-half principals and a dozen Bambi-Linnish ladies known as Brenda.

You'd think that Nunnally Johnson and George Kaufman could dig up a fresher and firmer basic jest on which to construct their "Park Avenue." I'd think so, at any rate! Bennett Cerf, sitting, with Mrs. Cerf, behind me last evening in the Shubert Theatre, has a million of them. And quite a few are his very own!

But, even so, Mr. Johnson and Mr. Kaufman are content to tell, retell, then tell again the country club comic-strip about marriages being made in heaven and unmade in Reno—or however the wisecrack runs! So, by the time the final version is finally repeated, the jest is as weary as the patience of its hearers.

Oscar Wilde cracks wiser at the Cort!

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Love on a Binge

Wasn't there a ballad about marriage being the Keeley cure for love's intoxication? Well, that's the unsung theme-song of "Park Avenue." Everybody up on the stage hard by Shubert Alley is married to one of the other characters. Or has been married to one of the other characters. Or is to be married to—

Not long ago, June Havoc sang wholeheartedly about this sort of on-again, off-again, gone-again matrimony in a song called "Abracadabra" in a show called "Mexican Hayride." Now, in "Park Avenue," Leonora Corbett sings about it, talks about it and acts about it, surrounded by all her husbands, past, present and to come.

And so does Arthur Margetson, seconded by such merely featured players as Raymond Walburn, Martha Stewart, Mary Wickes, David Wayne, Ray McDonald, Ruth Matteson, Robert Chisholm, Marthe Errolle and Charles Purcell. In the course of the plot's undoing, these fall in love, marry, then fall right out again.

Even when surrounded by Ira Gershwin's persistent lyrics, Arthur Schwartz's modest music, Donald Oenslager's showy settings, Helen Tamiris' darndest dances and, where Miss Corbett is alone concerned, Mainbocher's smartest get-ups, marriage remains the Keeley cure for love's intoxication.

And love is "nothing," as in tennis!

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Boy Gets Girl

Only the Ned Scott who is Ray McDonald and the Madge Bennett who is Martha Stewart remain unmarried, undivorced and unhappy up to what should be the final curtain. An attractive boy and girl who look—and sing and act, I wouldn't be surprised—like anybody's niece and nephew, they make "Park Avenue" safe for musical-comedy.

Mary Wickes is funnier than the other females as the make-believe wife of Raymond Walburn. And Raymond Walburn is funnier than the other males as the make-believe husband of Mary Wickes. David Wayne turns in quite a comic bit as Mr. Meachem, keeper of the now-we're-married, now-we're-not Bennetts' just too fashionable family tree.

As for those eighteen Park Avenuers by the name of Brenda, they wear their Tina Leser dresses, go through their Helen Tamiris gyrations and chant their Ira Gershwin lyrics as they've been told to do. They're aided and abetted by the men, two of whom have little else to do but lift the hero up and set him down again.

The truth, which herewith comes out, is that if "Park Avenue" went upward and onward from its opening, it might turn out to be an excellent entertainment. Instead, it goes downward and backward. This is a shame, because so much good time, good talent, good money and good humor have been lavished on its preparation...

Although they're artfully covered over, "Park Avenue," onstage and off, is down by the railroad tracks just the same.